

## **Men and Depression**

Researchers estimate that at least six million men in the United States suffer from a depressive disorder every year. Research and clinical evidence reveal that while both women and men can develop the standard symptoms of depression, they often experience depression differently and may have different ways of coping with the symptoms. Men may be more willing to acknowledge fatigue, irritability, loss of interest in work or hobbies, and sleep disturbances rather than feelings of sadness, worthlessness, and excessive guilt.

Men are more likely than women to report alcohol and drug abuse or dependence in their lifetime; however, there is debate among researchers as to whether substance use is a "symptom" of underlying depression in men, or a co-occurring condition that more commonly develops in men. Nevertheless, substance use can mask depression, making it harder to recognize depression as a separate illness that needs treatment.

Instead of acknowledging their feelings, asking for help, or seeking appropriate treatment, men may turn to alcohol or drugs when they are depressed, or become frustrated, discouraged, angry, irritable and, sometimes, violently abusive. Some men deal with depression by throwing themselves compulsively into their work, attempting to hide their depression from themselves, family, and friends; other men may respond to depression by engaging in reckless behavior, taking risks, and putting themselves in harm's way.

## **Diagnostic Evaluation and Treatment**

The first step to getting appropriate treatment for depression is a physical examination by a physician. Certain medications as well as some medical conditions such as a viral infection, thyroid disorder, or low testosterone level can cause the same symptoms as depression, and the physician should rule out these possibilities through examination, interview, and lab tests. If no such cause of the depressive symptoms is found, a psychological evaluation for depression should be done by the physician or by referral to a mental health professional.

Treatment choice will depend on the patient's diagnosis, severity of symptoms, and preference. There are a variety of treatments, including medications and short-term psychotherapies (i.e., "talking" therapies), which have proven effective for depressive disorders. In general, severe depressive illnesses, particularly those that are recurrent, will require a combination of treatments for the best outcome.

## **How to Help Yourself if You Are Depressed**

Depressive disorders make one feel exhausted, worthless, helpless, and hopeless. Such negative thoughts and feelings make some people feel like giving up. It is important to realize that these negative views are part of the depression and typically do not accurately reflect the actual circumstances. Negative thinking fades as treatment begins to take effect. In the meantime:

- Mild exercise, going to a movie, a ballgame, or participating in religious, social, or other activities may help.
- Set realistic goals in light of the depression and assume a reasonable amount of responsibility.
- Break large tasks into small ones, set some priorities, and do what you can as you can
- Try to be with other people and to confide in someone; it is usually better than being alone and secretive.
- Participate in activities that may make you feel better.
- Expect your mood to improve gradually, not immediately. Feeling better takes time. Often during treatment of depression, sleep and appetite will begin to improve before depressed mood lifts.
- It is advisable to postpone important decisions until the depression has lifted. Before deciding to make a significant transition-change job, get married or divorced-discuss it with others who know you well and have a more objective view of your situation.
- People rarely "snap out of" a depression. But they can feel a little better day-by-day.
- Remember, positive thinking will replace the negative thinking that is part of the depression and will disappear as your depression responds to treatment.
- Let your family and friends help you.

## **INFORMATION**

Obtained from: National Institute of Mental Health

Website: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>